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The background marker ná in Barayin

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Abstract: This article gives a first account of the background marker **ná** in Barayin, an East Chadic language spoken in the Guera region of Chad. The article describes the marker's syntactic distribution and the semantic and pragmatic contexts it occurs in. It commonly occurs following a sentence-initial noun phrase or adverbial, and it also commonly follows a sentence-initial dependent clause such as a conditional clause. The material preceding **ná** is background information which provides a context for the interpretation of the following proposition, which is the main point of the communication.

Keywords: information structure, background, Chadic, topic, focus

1 Introduction

Barayin [bva] is a Chadic language spoken by an estimated 5,000 people in the Guera region near the center of the Republic of Chad. The first grammatical analysis of the language (Jalkiya dialect) is by Lovestrand (2012). This article expands that work by giving a first account of the syntactic distribution, function and meaning of the marker **ná**—the single most common word in Barayin texts.

The marker **ná** in Barayin divides a sentence into two parts. In this sense, the marker is similar to what Levinsohn (2012: 74) calls a “spacer”, and it creates what Güldemann (2010) calls a “bisected” structure. There is often (about half of the time) a noticeable pause following the marker **ná**. In other words, the marker **ná** appears to create a unit with the preceding material that can be phonologically separated from the following material.

The material preceding **ná** can be a “term” or a “proposition”. A term can be a noun phrase, prepositional phrase, or adverb. The term is normally either an argument selected by the verb (e.g., subject or object) or an adjunct (e.g., locative or adverbial). A proposition is a larger constituent which can be either a full clause or a clause that appears to have a gap filled by the term on the other side of the marker **ná**. The marker **ná** can divide a term and a proposition in either order, or occur between two propositions or two terms. In rare cases, the marker

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ná appears to occur in a sentence-initial position. In all cases, the material preceding **ná** can be described as background information which gives the addressee the appropriate context for understanding what follows **ná**.

Examples (1) and (2) show two of the most common places where the marker **ná** (glossed NA) occurs. In example (1) it follows a sentence-initial argument of the verb, and is followed by the remainder of the finite clause. In example (2), it follows one finite clause, and is followed by another. Example (3) shows the third type, where **ná** separates two terms. The fourth type of construction using **ná** is shown in example (4). In this example the noun following **ná** appears to be the object/patient of the proposition preceding **ná**. The fifth type, sentence-initial **ná**, will be discussed in Section 2.5.¹

- (1) **mijjo ná sule makid-a-ti penden-ji**
 person NA PROG arrange-IPFV-OBJ.3SG.F bow-POSS.3SG.M
 ‘The man was arranging his bow.’ (Carnivores 31)
- (2) **ni kol-eyi ŋ ammi ná dop-a je ammi**
 SBJ.3PL go-IPFV OBL water NA find-PFV PART water
 ‘They went for water, and they found it.’ (Mosso 9)
- (3) **tande ná suk de genne**
 yesterday NA market REL.SG.F ours
 ‘Yesterday was our market.’ (Yesterday 1)
- (4) **ti wonn-eyi ná non-geti**
 SBJ.3SG.F know-IPFV NA child-POSS.3SG.F
 ‘It’s her child that she knows. (Not other children.)’

This introductory section contains a brief overview of the morphosyntax (Section 1.1) and information structure (Section 1.2) of Barayin, an introduction to background markers in other languages (Section 1.3), and an overview of the data used for this study (Section 1.4). The marker **ná**, like similar markers in other languages, is noteworthy for its distribution in what appears to be several distinct, but related contexts. Not only does the marker **ná** occur in a variety of syntactic positions, it also occurs in what appears to be a wide variety of semantic and pragmatic contexts. Section 2 contains a detailed description of the syntactic distribution of the marker **ná**. Many of the diverse semantic and pragmatic contexts where the marker **ná** occurs in natural speech are illustrated

¹ Examples are given in a simplified orthographic representation. More detailed phonetic transcriptions of most examples can be found in Lovestrand (2012). The set of recordings referred to as the “corpus” in Section 1.4 can be accessed via the website of the Endangered Languages Archive at SOAS: <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI1035101>.

in Section 3. The variety of contexts where **ná** occurs are all analyzable as following background information. Section 4 is a brief conclusion.

1.1 Barayin morphosyntax overview

Barayin is SVO in its unmarked word order, as are most Chadic languages (Frajyngier 1996: 15; Newman 2006: 199; Schuh 2003: 58). Indirect objects and adjuncts follow the object, and the final positions in a sentence are occupied by a negative marker and a question marker. There is also a pre-subject clause-internal position which will be discussed in Section 1.2. The following simplified template gives an overview of the basic clause structure:

PRE-SUBJECT SUBJECT PREDICATE OBJECT INDIRECT.OBJECT/ADJUNCT NEGATION QUESTION

Figure 1: Simplified word order template for Barayin.

Subjects normally occur immediately before the predicate, whether the predicate is verbal or non-verbal, and whether the subject is nominal or pronominal. An overt subject is not obligatory and can be omitted in any case where the speaker deems the context clear enough for the hearer to discern the unstated subject. Indirect objects, locative arguments, adjuncts and adverbs typically occur following the direct object (if present) in a SVOX pattern. Interrogative mood (yes/no question) can be expressed by intonation, or is marked by a clause-final marker. Negation is expressed through a marker **do** in the penultimate position. It can only be followed by an interrogative marker. Reported speech clauses (whether direct or indirect quotation) are typically preceded by a quotative which indexes the person, number and gender features of the speaker.

There are several morphologically distinct pronominal paradigms including: independent pronouns, subject proclitics, direct object suffixes and indirect object suffixes. These forms are given in Table 1. Each paradigm has ten pronouns. There is one dual (inclusive) form in the first person, and an inclusive/exclusive distinction in the first person plural. Note that the first person plural inclusive forms are bimorphemic. They are made up of the combination of a first person dual inclusive form with the enclitic **nà** (glossed PL) with a low tone—not to be confused with the background marker **ná** with a high tone. Second and third person singular forms (and any agreement-sensitive words like adjectives and demonstratives) are distinguished for gender (masculine and feminine), but plurals are not.

Independent pronouns have the same distribution as a noun phrase. They can function as a subject or direct object, but do so more rarely than other

Table 1: Pronominal forms in Barayin.

	Independent	Subject	Direct Object	Indirect Object
1SG	inu	ŋ	-nu	-aw
2SG.M	killa	ki	-go	-ago
2SG.F	kella	ke	-ge	-age
3SG.M	kalla	ka	-ga	-eyi
3SG.F	tilla	ti	-ti	-ati
1DU.INCL	aya	iŋ	-ya	-aya
1PL.INCL	aya=nà	iŋ VERB=nà	-ya=nà	-aya=nà
1PL.EXCL	ane	ane	-ne	-ane
2PL	ní lla	ní	-ŋ	-aŋ
3PL	nilla	ni	-ŋ	-aga

forms. They are used in prepositional phrases, and are also the vocative form. Subject pronouns are not prefixes, but they are phonologically dependent on the following or preceding word, and have a limited syntactic distribution. They typically occur immediately before the verb (or non-verbal predicate). Only a limited number of adverbial words can intervene between a subject pronoun and the predicate. Third person subject pronouns can combine with one of three adnominal demonstratives (**gi** SG.M, **di** SG.F, **ni** PL) to create a demonstrative pronoun with the same distribution as a noun phrase or Independent pronoun: **ka gi**, **ti di**, and **ni ni**.

Direct and indirect object suffixes can have a pronominal function when they occur without a co-referential noun phrase in the same clause. They can also function as agreement markers when they occur with a co-referential noun phrase under certain discourse conditions. In a pattern similar to differential object marking, direct object suffixes normally co-occur with a (co-referential) definite nominal direct object, and do not co-occur if the nominal direct object is indefinite. However, there are some exceptions to this pattern. For more discussion, see Lovstrand (2012: 135).

Tense, aspect, and mood (TAM) are primarily encoded in verbal suffixes. TAM suffixes precede pronominal suffixes in the verbal morphology, and are often subject to suppletion or deletion when a pronominal suffix is present. TAM suffixes cannot combine to create complex TAM forms. The seven TAM suffixes are shown in Table 2 with the label describing their primary function. Future tense is expressed by a construction in which an oblique preposition **ŋ** is followed by a verb in the infinitive form.

Barayin, like all Chadic languages, is a tonal language. Tone is essentially lexical in function. Questions can be formed by raising the tone and elongating the final vowel of a declarative clause. A similar intonational pattern occurs on the final vowel of a relative clause if followed by a demonstrative

Table 2: Verbal TAM suffixes.

STEM-eyi	Imperfective
STEM-ga	Progressive
STEM-a	Perfective
STEM-e	Perfect
STEM-u	Subjunctive
STEM-ya	Hortative
STEM-o	Infinitive

(Lovestrand 2012: 67). There are not any clear correlations between tone and any grammatical or information-structural functions. In the orthographic representation of the language used here, tonal marking is normally omitted.

1.2 Barayin information structure overview

Topic is used here in its more restricted sense as “the thing which the proposition expressed by the sentence is about” (Lambrecht 1994: 118). It is important to keep this definition of topic in mind since several studies on markers similar to **ná** in Central Chadic languages have used a much broader definition of topic (Section 1.3). Focus is defined as “the semantic component of a pragmatically structured proposition whereby the assertion differs from the presupposition” (Lambrecht 1994: 213).

The study of information structure in Barayin is still very limited, but some preliminary assumptions can be made that will be helpful in the discussions throughout this article. Barayin does not have any particles dedicated to marking topic and focus of a particular noun phrase. It is generally the case that the topic will be a pronominal subject proclitic, or an assumed but unspoken subject.

It is likely the case that post-nominal demonstratives have an information structure function, but this issue has not yet been explored. There are two other information structure features of the language that are not in the scope of this study, but will be mentioned here briefly: the pre-subject position and a preverbal marker **joo** or **do** with contrastive meaning. The pre-subject position (Figure 1) clearly has some type of pragmatic meaning, but it is not well-understood. Interrogative pronouns, which are inherently focus words (Lambrecht 1994: 283), often occur *in situ* without any additional marking, however, they can also be preposed in a position before the subject, as in example (5).

- (5) **ma** **Mariam min-ga**
who Mariam slap-OBJ.3SG.M
‘Who did Mariam hit?’

Based on example (5), it would be plausible to suggest that the pre-subject position is a type of focus position. That analysis is less plausible for the rare cases of pre-subject object placement, as in **jeedo** ‘mountain’ in example (6). In the context, the mountain has already been mentioned in the preceding sentence, and the clause containing the object in a pre-subject position is a type of tail-head linkage followed by the marker **ná** (Section 3.8).

- (6) **jeedo ti di iŋ daw-o-geɬi=nà ná**
 mountain SBJ.3SG.F DEM.SG.F SBJ.1DU.INCL occupy?-INF-POSS.3SG.F=PL NA
ŋ daw-o-geɬi=nà ná talaŋ
 OBL occupy-INF-POSS=PL NA how
 ‘[After several years they said: Our mountain here NA, we should inhabit it.
 Then they said:] That mountain, we should inhabit it NA, but how?’ (History
 16)

understood, but it appears to have scope over the entire predication, not over a single noun phrase or other constituent. It can optionally occur in negative sentences, primarily those with a subjunctive verb, such as the imperative in example (9) or the prohibitive in example (10). However, **joo/doo** can also occur without negation when there is a contrastive meaning, as in example (11).

- (9) **joo/doo kol-u do**
 FOC go-SBJV NEG
 ‘Don’t go!’ (Lovestrand 2012: 186)
- (10) **nandanga doo noom-u iŋ aka do**
 children FOC play-SBJV ASOC fire NEG
 ‘Children should not play with fire.’ (Lovestrand 2012: 186)
- (11) **ŋ nandiy-aŋ-ju ŋ gar-eyi ŋ jappa wo**
 OBL children.PL-NMLZ-POSS.1SG SBJ.1SG study(Ar.)-IPFV OBL church but
sonde joo ŋ doy-eyi malumi-ya-ŋ
 now FOC SBJ.1SG study-IPFV islam(Ar.)-PL-NMLZ
 ‘During my childhood, I went to church, but now I follow Islam.’
 (Lovestrand 2012: 95)

1.3 Background markers in other languages

The term *background* is to be understood in the sense of Ameka (1991). Ameka describes a so-called “terminal” particle **lá** in Ewe which marks constituents that “typically carry information that a speaker wants an addressee to assume in order for him/her to process the rest of the discourse more easily” and which function as the “the domain within which the rest of the predication should be interpreted” (Ameka 1991: 152, 154). He concludes that the “invariant function of the terminal particles is to mark background information” (Ameka 1991: 152). In Ameka’s approach (and linguists writing on similar particles seem to agree), it is assumed that background is not incompatible with topic (“what the sentence is about”). His critique of those who have analyzed **lá** as a topic marker is not that it is contradictory, but that it is incomplete. Background can be understood as a larger category that includes the notion of topic (“what the sentence is about”), but is broader in that it also includes the function of sentence-initial dependent clauses and other types of information. In contrast, Ameka is clear that background and focus are incompatible (Ameka 1991: 152-153).

Many authors have described a particle with a similar function in Central Chadic languages. A relatively early study of the Central Chadic language Zulgo labels the marker **ká** a “Topic Marker” (Haller and Watters, 1984). Their use

of “topic” comes from Chafe (1976: 51) who writes that “‘Real’ topics (in topic-prominent languages) are not so much ‘what the sentence is about’ as ‘the frame within which the sentence holds’.” Although they take the label “topic” from Chafe, Haller and Watters (1984) propose a definition based on what Dik (1981: 19) calls “theme”: “The Theme specifies the universe of discourse with respect to which the subsequent predication is presented as relevant.” Haller and Watters (1984) argue that this concept gives a unified account of all of the uses of the marker *ká* in Zulgo. Haiman (1978) proposes a similar understanding of “topic” in his analysis of Hua, a Papuan language, claiming that the identical morphosyntactic marking for conditional protases and “topic” noun phrases not only shows that conditional clauses are “topics” in Hua, but that conditional clauses should be universally considered “topics”.² This use of the label “topic” is not followed in this article primarily to avoid potential confusion with topic as “what the sentence is about”. For example, Givn (1990: 846) argues against the use of “topic” for adverbial clauses by Haiman (1978) and Thompson and Longacre (1985) because of a clash with his definition of topic as “what the sentence is about”. Chafe saw this potential confusion over terminology as a significant issue, and later changed his terminology from “topic” to “starting point” (Chafe 1987: 22). Nonetheless, there is an obvious similarity between the concept of background used in this article, and the sense of “topic” as used by Chafe (1976), Haiman (1978) and other authors.

Several other linguists have followed Haller and Watters (1984) in using the label “Topic Marker” for a similar marker in other Central Chadic languages (Buwal: Viljoen (2013; 2015: 612); Gemzek: Scherrer (2012); Mofu-Gudur: Hollingsworth and Peck (1992); Hollingsworth (1985); Moloko and Muyang: Smith (2003); Ouldemè and Vamè: Kinnaird (1999); Wandala: Pohlig and Pohlig (1994)). However, most of these studies offer a slightly different descriptions of the meaning of “Topic Marker”. For example, Hollingsworth and Peck (1992), Scherrer (2012) and Smith (2003) prefer a description in terms of “point of departure”. Point of departure has a two-part definition: (1) “It establishes a starting point for the communication;” and (2) It “cohesively anchors the subsequent clause(s) to something which is already in the context (i.e., to something accessible in the hearer’s mental representation)” (Levinsohn 2012: 40). Again, this definition is very similar to Ameka’s “background”, Chafe’s “topic” and Dik’s “theme”, but it is more restricted by an emphasis on a link between the “point of departure” and the context (see Section 3.8).

² This approach was adopted by Seiler (1983), Thompson and Longacre (1985) and de Vries (1995). Haller and Watters (1984) also mention that Schuh (1972) made similar observations about a particle in Ngizim (West Chadic).

Other works on Central Chadic languages describe a marker with a similar distribution and function, but avoid giving any particular label to the marker (Gidar: Frajzyngier (2008: 379, 385–387, 437, 441); Hdi: Frajzyngier (2002: 391); Lamang: Wolff (1983: 244–247, 2015: 296–298); Mbuko: Gravina (2003); Wandala: Fluckiger and Whaley (1983)). At least two other labels have been proposed for these markers in Central Chadic languages: “spacer” (Dooley and Levinsohn 2001: 128) and “comment-clause marker” (Frajzyngier 2012).

In East Chadic languages, the branch Barayin belongs to, there has been very little study done on information structure and discourse particles. However, Lele has a marker **na** which, in addition to functioning as a demonstrative, also has a similar distribution to **ná** in Barayin (Frajzyngier 2001: 333–335, 420–423, 464–467). Schuh (2005: 89–95) identifies similar (unnamed) particles in four West Chadic languages: Bole, Ngamo, Karekare, Ngizim. These markers are also discussed by Güldemann (2016: 558–565) who cites Gimba (2005) as a source on the same marker in Bole, as does Zimmermann (2011: 1174–1176) in his discussion of the Bole data.

Outside of Chadic languages, a strikingly similar type of marker, also **ná**, is found in Bagirmi. Jacob (2010: 126) describes **ná** in Bagirmi as a “background marker” in addition to its functions as a determiner and a marker at the end of a relative clause. Jacob’s analysis is also discussed by Güldemann (2016: 565–567). Bagirmi is a Nilo-Saharan language that borders Barayin. Boujol and Clupot (1941: 34) report that the Barayin were previously in a vassal-suzerain relationship with the Bagirmi, and some older Barayin speakers still say they know how to speak Bagirmi. This seems to indicate that the similarity between Barayin and Bagirmi could potentially be at least partially explained by language contact.

Farther away, but still in Africa, Güldemann (2016: 567–572) draws attention to several publications about a particle **la** in Dagbani and other Oti-Volta (Niger-Congo) languages of Ghana. The marker is sometimes described as a focus marker, which happens to be isomorphic with a definite marker. Güldemann (2016: 570) concludes that the marker “is best analyzed as a background marker” on par with those in Chadic languages and Bagirmi. In his discussion of the background marker in Ewe (also a Niger-Congo language of Ghana), Ameka (1991: 168) lists a few other West African languages that have a similar marker, and suggests that background markers also occur in Polish, Thai and Japanese.

Besides their functional similarities, these markers are also similar to each other in that they can follow both sentence-initial noun phrases, and sentence-initial finite clauses. For example, “in Zulgo the particle **ka**, which is clearly used to mark a topicalized phrasal element, can also be used to mark clausal elements which at first glance appear to be cases of subordination” (Haller and Watters 1984: 27). The particle **lá** in Ewe “occurs at the end of preposed adverbial and

nominal phrases” and “also occurs at the end of various kinds of initial dependent clauses, for example conditionals” (Ameka 1991: 145–146). It is very common for background markers to be isomorphic with a demonstrative or definite marker, as well as a marker following relative clauses. However, this is not the case in Barayin. The particle **ná** is distinct from the demonstratives **gi**, **di** and **ni**. In Barayin, these demonstratives (not the background marker **ná**) optionally occur in the position at the end of a relative clause.

Güldemann (2016: 571) warns that “**la**-like particles are numerous across Oti-Volta but they do not all share the same functional and syntactic profile. So whatever the analysis of **la** in Dagbani and Gurene, it must not be transferred rashly to related languages with similar particles...” Similarly, Ameka (1991: 168) points out the need for further investigation of these similarities, but cautions that a “prerequisite for such a research is the systematic documentation and analysis of the data in individual languages.” This study of **ná** in Barayin contributes to the need for documentation of discourse particles in individual languages, leaving aside the intriguing comparative research for future work.

1.4 Data sources

The data used for the analysis of the particle **ná** in Barayin consists primarily of transcribed monologues, most of which are appended to Lovestrand (2012). Two additional more-recently transcribed stories were added to the corpus since they contain some uses of **ná** not seen in the other texts. These two stories are not yet published. Throughout this article, data extracted from these texts are referenced by a one word abbreviation of the title and the line number. The abbreviations are in Table 3. These nine transcribed texts will be referred to as the “corpus”.

Table 3: Abbreviations for corpus references.

Ap.	Title	Abbreviation	Lines	Words	# of ná
7	Life in Mongo	Mongo	12	75	6
8	Directions to Moussa’s home	Directions	32	286	20
9	What Sayide did yesterday	Yesterday	20	101	2
10	History of the Barayin	History	46	304	35
11	The well at Mosso	Mosso	13	91	4
12	The carnivores	Carnivores	75	354	29
13	About a girl	Girl	79	432	31
–	Loori and the lion	Loori	254	1589	144
–	Hyena and the squirrel	Bulmi	68	731	77

The particle **ná** occurs rarely in elicited language data of isolated phrases, but it is very common in the corpus of transcribed recordings of natural speech. In 599 (arbitrarily) divided lines of text (3963 words), it occurs 348 times. On average, more than half of the lines have the particle. In a slightly larger collection of fifteen texts, the marker **ná** is the most common word (690 occurrences), followed by the preposition **ŋ** (612 occurrences), and then the third person subject pronouns (294 SG.M, 232 PL, 168 SG.F).

2 Syntax of the marker **ná**

The five syntactic environments where **ná** can occur (the first four of which are shown in examples (1) through (4) above) are represented more abstractly by the following abbreviations (cf., Haller and Watters 1984: 43)

- term-**ná**-proposition
- proposition-**ná**-proposition
- term-**ná**-term
- proposition-**ná**-term
- **ná**-proposition

The first two syntactic environments (term-**ná**-proposition and proposition-**ná**-proposition) are very common in Barayin and other languages. These are described in detail in Sections 2.1 and 2.2. The third and fourth types have a smaller constituent, often a noun phrase or an interrogative word, following **ná**. These are discussed in Sections 2.3 and 2.4. Neither of these two structures is very common in the corpus of monologues. In Section 2.7 it is proposed that a single term following **ná** should be analyzed as functioning as a predicate in its own right. Therefore the distribution of **ná** can be described as always preceding a predication. Examples of **ná** in a sentence-initial position are discussed in Section 2.5. This is the least common construction, only occurring twice in the corpus. Section 2.6 contains examples of more than one **ná** being used in the same sentence. A proposed formal analysis of the syntactic structure of **ná** is presented in Section 2.7.

2.1 Term-**ná**-proposition

This section gives examples of the term-**ná**-proposition construction. In many of the instances of this construction, the term occurring before the marker **ná** can be identified as a subject, object or indirect object of the proposition following the

ná. In some cases, a pronominal element co-referential with the **ná**-marked term occurs in the following proposition. In example (12), the word **mijjo** ‘man/person’ before the marker **ná** can be identified as the subject of the following clause. The independent pronoun **kalla** in the subject position of the following proposition is co-referential with **mijjo**.

- (12) **mijjo ná kalla bala inda-ji**
 person NA 3SG.M without(Ar.) have(Ar.)-POSS.3SG.M
 ‘The man, he has nothing.’ (Carnivores 25)

It is not the case that a marked sentence-initial term always has to have its grammatical function in the following proposition identified by an overt pronoun. In the seven texts appended to Lovestrand (2012), there are eighteen examples where the **ná**-marked term in the sentence-initial position can be identified as the subject of the following proposition. In only two of those cases does the following proposition have a co-referential subject pronoun. In most cases, there is no overt subject in the proposition following **ná**, as in example (13). In this case, the subject role of the **ná**-marked term is identified by its semantic role and the gap in the subject position of the following clause.

- (13) **inu ná ŋ kol-o ŋ duw-o-ji**
 1SG NA OBL go-INF OBL see-INF-POSS.3SG.M
 ‘I will go to see it.’ (Carnivores 48)

It is much less common for a term marked by **ná** to be identified as the direct or indirect object of the following proposition. In the seven texts appended to Lovestrand (2012), there are only three examples of a direct object occurring in this construction. In one case, example (14), the following clause has a pronominal object suffix that is co-referential with the sentence-initial term.

- (14) **mijjo ná joo jel-ga=nà iŋ nilla do**
 person NA FOC put-OBJ.3SG.M=PL ASOC 2PL NEG
 ‘The man... You should not put him with you.’ (Carnivores 57-58)

In the other two cases, one of which is shown in example (15), the following clause does not have an object suffix or pronoun co-indexing the sentence-initial term. The word **ragga** ‘mat’ is understood to have the semantic role of patient, which is the semantic role normally assigned to a direct object by this verb in this context.

- (15) **ragga ná iŋ t-eyi t-ii do**
 mat NA SBJ.1DU.INCL eat-IPFV eat-INF NEG
 ‘We didn’t eat the mat.’ (Girl 56)

In the same seven texts, there is only one example of a **ná**-marked sentence-initial constituent that can be identified as the indirect object of the following proposition. In example (16), the verb of the proposition has an indirect object suffix (glossed DAT) that is co-referential with the sentence-initial constituent.

- (16) **aya kaw ná ni joo duw-aya je ragga nerwa**
 1DU.INCL also NA SBJ.3PL FOC put-DAT.1DU.INCL PART mat skin
gi bas
 DEM.SG.M only(Ar.)
 ‘Us too, they put down this leather mat for us.’ (Girl 35–36)

Adjunctival prepositional phrases or adverbs also commonly occur in the sentence-initial position before the marker **ná**, as in example (17).

- (17) **ij bodo ná ni ni naa marbo ti di ná**
 ASOC night NA SBJ.3PL DEM.PL QUOT.3PL girl SBJ.3SG.F DEM.SG.F NA
sent-eti aj-o
 refusal-POSS.3SG.F come-INF
 ‘That night, they said: That girl refuses to come.’ (Girl 22–23)

It is also common for locatives indicating source or setting to appear in a sentence-initial position followed by the marker **ná**, as in examples (18) and (19).

- (18) **Baro ná ni s-eyi Barlo**
 Baro NA SBJ.3PL come-IPFV Barlo
 ‘From Baro, they came to Barlo.’ (History 2)
- (19) **ij suk Alay ná direkt ki ij jaug-o**
 OBL market(Ar.) Alay NA directly(Fr.) SBJ.2SG.M OBL descend-INF
 ‘At the Alay market, you keep going straight down.’ (Directions 10)

In example (20), a sentence-initial ideophone is followed by **ná**. Ideophones in Barayin generally have the same syntactic distribution as adverbs.

- (20) **ratatatatata ná iss-a-jo luwa raga**
 IDEO NA pour-IPFV-DTRV above mat
 ‘Plop plop plop. It fell onto the mat.’ (Girl 29)

2.2 Proposition-ná-proposition

In addition to marking a single sentence-initial term, the marker **ná** can also appear between two finite clauses, as seen in examples (21) and (22).

- (21) **ka t-aa je ná ka kol-u**
 SBJ.3SG.M eat-PFV PART NA SBJ.3SG.M go-SBJV
 ‘When he has eaten, he should leave.’ (Lovestrand 2012: 110)
- (22) **to ki s-etta ná ino η n-ii**
 COND SBJ.2SG.M come-PRF NA *boule* OBL cook-INF
 ‘When you arrive, the *boule* will be ready.’ (Lovestrand 2012: 208)

The marker **ná** never occurs at the end of a sentence. An adverbial clause marked by a clause-initial **to** ‘if/when’ (like that in example (22)) can occur either before or after the main clause. The subordinating conjunction **to** is called a conditional marker but, as will be seen in Section 3.4, it can have either conditional (‘if’) or temporal (‘when’) meaning. When the conditional clause follows the main clause, it is not possible for the marker **ná** to occur at the end of the adverbial clause, as is shown in example (23). The marker **ná** cannot be described syntactically as a clause-final marker.

- (23) **ino η n-ii to ki s-etta (*ná)**
boule OBL cook-INF COND SBJ.2SG.M come-PRF (NA)
 ‘The *boule* will be ready when you arrive.’

2.3 Term-ná-term

In all of the examples of term-**ná**-term structures examined, the first term is a noun phrase. The second term can also be a noun phrase, as in examples (24) and (25). Example (24) is an identificational construction where the pronominal preceding **ná** is co-referential with the noun phrase following **ná** (Section 3.6).

- (24) **ti di ná non-ju di**
 SBJ.3SG.F DEM.SG.F NA child-POSS.1SG DEM.SG.F
 ‘This is my daughter.’ (Lovestrand 2012: 208)

In example (25), the noun phrase preceding **ná** is the unspoken subject of the nominal predicate following **ná**. The noun **ana** (often with a possessive suffix indexing the subject) is the standard way to express existence or presence in Barayin (Lovestrand 2012: 205–207). In this case, even though only a single word follows **ná**, that single word must be analyzed as a non-verbal predicate, just as it would if it were a single verb. This analysis can also plausibly be applied to the noun phrase following **ná** in example (24), as will be proposed in Section 2.7.

- (25) **ragga-jij ná ana-geti**
 mat-POSS.2PL NA presence-POSS.3SG.F
 ‘Your mat was still there.’ (Girl 51)

In example (26) the second term is an adjective. However, in this particular context the adjective does not modify the sentence-initial noun. In the story, a husband is searching for his wife who was taken back by her family. The wife does not know whether or not to respond to his calls. In this example, the grandmother speaks to the daughter empathizing with her since, in this situation involving her husband, it is difficult to know what to do. The adjective ‘difficult’ is functioning as a predicate describing the situation. It is not modifying the husband.

- (26) **meeri ná tega-gu**
 husband NA difficult-SG.M
 ‘With your husband, it’s hard [to refuse].’ (Loori 144)

2.4 Proposition-**ná**-term

There are fewer examples of the proposition-**ná**-term construction than the types described above. In examples (27) and (28), the word following **ná** is an interrogative word. Content questions are often formed using an interrogative word *in situ* or in a sentence-initial position. However, interrogatives can also occur in a clause-final position when preceded by **ná**. In this construction, the speaker first gives all of the presupposed elements of the question, followed by the marker **ná**, and then the appropriate question word.

- (27) **mapana ki d-ii-ga ná talaŋ**
 thing SBJ.2SG.M kill-PFV-OBJ.3SG.M NA how
 ‘How did you kill this thing?’ (lit., thing you killed it NA how) (Carnivores 68)
- (28) **de ŋ aj-o ŋ t-ii=nà ná mo gi saŋ**
 REL.SG.M OBL come-INF OBL eat-INF=PL NA what DEM.SG.M Q
 ‘...which we will come to eat, what [is it]?’ (Carnivores 29)

There are also a few examples where the term following **ná** is not an interrogative word. In example (29), the final term is an ideophone.

- (29) **l-ega ná kiŋkil**
 send-IPFV NA IDEO
 ‘They put down a lot!’ (Loori 134)

Example (30) is an elicited example modeled after similar sentences documented in other Chadic languages (e.g., Buwal: Viljoen (2013: 607); Mbuko: Gravina (2003: 7)). The marker **ná** separates a clause-final direct object from the rest of the clause.

- (30) **ka t-eyi ná suu**
 SBJ.3SG.M eat-IPFV NA meat
 ‘It’s meat that he eats.’

2.5 Sentence-initial ná (ná-proposition)

In just two cases, the particle **ná** appears to occur in a sentence-initial position. These are shown in examples (31) and (32).

- (31) a. **kaa d-aa d-ii de Njamena teyi da**
 QUOT.3SG.M walk-PFV walk-INF REL.SG.F N’Djamena like.that ???
 ‘He said: You walk the walk of N’Djamena like that?’
- b. **taa njamena njamena njamena njamena**
 QUOT.3SG.F N’Djamena N’Djamena N’Djamena N’Djamena
 ‘She said: N’Djamena. N’Djamena. N’Djamena. N’Djamena.’
- c. **ná taa gi hay killa duw-ga nopuno ge**
 NA QUOT.3SG.F DEM.SG.M hey 2SG.M see-OBJ.3SG.M goat REL.SG.M
dogo alli
 until there
 ‘Then she said: Hey, you see that goat over there?’ (Bulmi 58-60)
- (32) a. **kalas ná sonde hiya ka duwa joo wal-lo**
 that’s.all(Ar.) NA now so(Ar.) SBJ.3SG.M lion FOC spend.a.year-OBL
je maɲa
 PART bush
 ‘So now the lion returned to the jungle.’
- b. **aya=nà mijjo att-u ge siidi**
 1DU.INCL=PL person remain-SBJV REL.SG.M home
 ‘We humans stayed at home.’
- c. **ná sidiki jeedo sidiki ti di**
 NA story again story SBJ.3SG.F DEM.SG.F
 ‘So, this story is yet another story.’ (Loori 252-254)

The analysis of the clauses in examples (31c) and (32c) as a distinct sentence from the preceding clause is based both on the meaning of the clauses and the prosody. In both examples, there is a noticeable pause before **ná**. A pause preceding **ná** is rare, if it at all occurs elsewhere. In terms of meaning, there is no obvious logical connection between the preceding clause and the clause followed by **ná**.

2.6 Multiple instances of **ná** in one sentence

It is not uncommon for more than one **ná** to appear in the same sentence. Güldemann (2016: 567) points out that this also happens in Bagirmi, but not in the four West Chadic languages he studied. In Barayin, this partitioning of the pre-clausal space can take several forms. For example, it can be a sequence of sentence-initial terms, each marked with **ná** as in example (33) where the two terms are co-referential.

- (33) **mejere ná abbo-ya-tiya** **alli ná ganda t-ii-ga**
 people NA neighbor-PL-POSS.1DU.INCL there NA inside eat-IPFV-OBJ.3SG.M
 ‘...Those people, our neighbors there, are eating it.’ (Girl 33)

It is also possible to string together more than one clause marked by **ná** as in example (34).³

- (34) a. **att-e** **mijjo ná**
 remain-PRF person NA
 ‘When only the man was left,’
 b. **ni** **sul-eyi ŋ** **doo de** **ni** **sul-lo je ná**
 SBJ.3PL sit-IPFV OBL place REL.SG.F SBJ.3PL sit-OBL PART NA
 ‘they sat where they sat before,’
 c. **ni** **gas-eyi ...**
 SBJ.3PL say-IPFV
 ‘and they said...’ (Carnivores 23–25)

The use of the marker **ná** can create even more complex sentences. The marker **ná** occurs four times in example (35). It first is used with three consecutive terms (a location, the subject of the following clause, and a modifier of that subject), and then it occurs again between that clause and the next clause.

- (35) **min** **Gili ná mejera-tiga** **ná sina** **ná juk-eyi** **ná naa**
 from(Ar.) Gili NA people-POSS.3PL NA other NA stand-IPFV NA QUOT.3PL
ane **kol-u duw-ga** **jeedo**
 1PL.EXCL go-SBJV see-OBJ.3SG.M mountain

³ Note that in example (34), the apparent subject of the verb **att-o** ‘remain’ follows the verb. This is also seen with this verb in example (56). This marked word order occurs often with this particular verb, but not with other verbs. This is similar to languages in the Senegambian region where it is common for the verb ‘remain’ to be the only verb to allow what is sometimes called a “presentational” or “thetic” structure in which the sole argument of the verb is presented postverbally, losing the properties of a typical subject (Creissels et al. 2015: 69–71).

‘From Gili, their people, some of them, got up, and they said: We should go see the mountain...’ (History 6–7)

2.7 Formal syntactic structure of ná

The syntactic distribution of **ná** can be generalized by stating that **ná** must always be followed by a clause or predicate. This approach would allow **ná** to be treated as a type of complementizer. In an X-bar theoretic analysis, it could be postulated that **ná** is the head of a CP projection, of which the following material is the complement, and the preceding material is the specifier. This analysis aligns with the strong pattern of left-headedness in the language. The specifier position must then allow a variety of lexical categories such as NP, PP, AdvP and S (or IP). The sister of C, its complement, would be either S (or IP) or CP when more than one **ná** appears in the same sentence. Figure 2 is a model of this proposed analysis applied to example (35) with multiple instances of **ná**.

In examples where **ná** is followed by a term, that term is analyzed as a non-verbal predicate with an unspoken subject. An existential clause consisting of

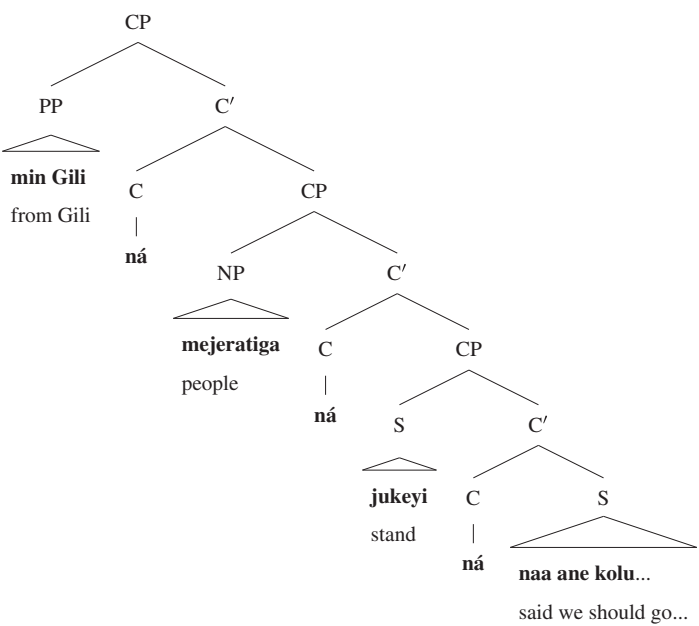


Figure 2: Structure of example (35).

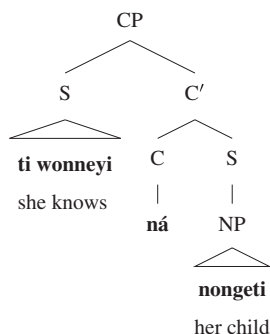


Figure 3: Structure of example (4).

a single noun phrase or adjective seems plausible since Barayin has both non-verbal predicates (Lovestrand 2012: 204-210) and clauses with no overt subject. In example (4), ‘She knows **ná** child’, and similar examples, the single word following **ná** (e.g., ‘child’) would then have to be interpreted as having an existential predicative function (i.e., ‘It is her child.’). This structure is shown in Figure 3.

It is interesting to note that in this proposed analysis there is a mismatch between the syntactic structure and the prosodic and semantic structures. The marker **ná** forms a tighter syntactic constituent with the following material than the preceding, even though it forms a prosodic constituent with the preceding material, and its meaning might also be said to scope leftward (cf. Cysouw 2005).

3 Semantic and pragmatic contexts where **ná** occurs in Barayin

Section 2 above presents the varying types of syntactic constituents that can occur before and after the marker **ná**. This section gives an overview of several types of semantic and pragmatic material that can occur before the marker **ná**. Each subsection gives an example of a semantic or pragmatic context where **ná** is used. The contexts given are not necessarily exhaustive. The examples are meant to give an overall impression of the variety of contexts that the marker can occur in.

The types of information that can be marked by **ná** include: marked topics, vocatives, ordinal and temporal adverbials, conditional clauses, other finite background clauses, and the presupposition of a maximal backgrounding construction. In most cases, the use of **ná** is obligatory in the sense that the same information structure or pragmatic effect is not achieved without the marker. However, in the case of conditional clauses and ordinal and temporal phrases,

the use of **ná** appears to be somewhat redundant, such that its removal does not obviously change the meaning of the clause in any way.

Section 3.7 briefly discusses the possible use of a sentence-initial **ná** to background the preceding discourse beyond one term or proposition. Section 3.8 explores a slightly different issue: how sentences with **ná** are used in creating discourse coherence between sentences by restating information from a previous sentence in a pattern that can be described as tail-head linkage or point of departure.

3.1 Marked topics

Recall that topic in this article is defined as “what the sentence is about”, and that it is generally the case in Barayin that the subject of a clause is also the topic. However, in certain cases, the topic is marked by **ná**. Topic has always been considered a part of the concept of background (Section 1.3). Presenting a topic as background gives the addressee the context in which the following information is relevant, making it easier for the proposition to be interpreted. Backgrounding serves as a way to signal that a non-subject is the topic, or that a subject is a new or contrastive topic.

In example (36), the hyena runs back to the group of animals to report on what he has just learned about the human. The hyena is giving information about the human to the other animals. The direct quote in (36b) begins with the noun phrase “person” followed by **ná** and co-referenced by a direct object suffix. Since the human is both the topic and the direct object, it is marked by **ná**. Otherwise the subject would be the topic by default.

- (36) a. **ka gor-eyi s-eyi**
 SBJ.3SG.M run-IPFV come-IPFV
 ‘He (Hyena) ran back.’
- b. **kaa mijjo ná joo jel-ga=nà ij nílla do**
 QUOT.3SG.M person NA FOC put-OBJ.3SG.M=PL ASOC 2PL NEG
 ‘He said: The man, you should not put him with you.’
- c. **mijjo paka-gu**
 person bad-M.SG
 ‘The man is evil.’ (Carnivores 56-59)

In some works on similar particles in other Chadic languages, constructions containing a marked sentence-initial term, like example (36b), are given a free translation beginning with “As for...”. In general, the free translations I give are

meant to be the English equivalent of the French translation given by the Barayin speaker who translated the text. My intuition is that, in many instances, the “As for...” translation would be a misinterpretation of the information structure. Chafe (1976: 49) analyzes the “As for...” construction in English is an example of what he calls “focus of contrast” (i.e., contrastive focus), and not the equivalent of what he calls “topic” (here called *background*). A reviewer suggests that “As for...” constructions could also be interpreted as a case of contrastive topic, depending on the context. In either case, the “As for...” English sentences are an appropriate free translation in some, but not all uses of the marker **ná** following a noun phrase in Barayin.

Example (37) is from another story where two pairs of animals are at odds because one pair ate a mat they should not have eaten, and they fear what consequences may come. After referring to the mat, they ask the other pair what they will say once the group arrives at their destination. In response, the innocent pair make a comment about their mat (which they did not eat). The pair of transgressors react to this by starting a fight. In order to make the mat the topic of their response, it is introduced as a sentence-initial constituent followed by **ná** in example (37c). The mat is understood to be the patient/object of the following clause, but (unlike example (36)) there is no co-referential pronominal element in the following clause. The role of the mat in the following clause is inferred by the semantics and the gap in the object position.

- (37) a. **bulmi kaa gi**
 hyena QUOT.3SG.M DEM.SG.M
 ‘Hyena said this:’
- b. **ane ... to ane kol-e ŋ gas-o ná gi**
 1PL.EXCL COND 1PL.EXCL go-PRF OBL say-INF NA DEM.SG.M
 ‘We... when we arrive, what we will say is this:’
- c. **ragga ná iŋ t-eyi t-ii do**
 mat NA SBJ.1DU.INCL eat-IPFV eat-INF NEG
 ‘We didn’t eat the mat.’ (lit., The mat, we didn’t eat.) (Girl 54-56)

Since subjects are by default the topic, they do not need to be morphosyntactically marked for this function. However, if a subject is new in the discourse (or not the topic of the previous sentence), it may be followed by **ná**. Cross-linguistically it is not surprising to find that new topics are morphosyntactically marked (Givón 2001: 254). In example (38), from the Carnivores narrative, the scene switches from a conversation between the animals about the man as they wonder how he will be able to hunt (example (38a)), to the activity of the man

(example (38b)). At this point in the narrative, the subject is marked with **ná**. Following **ná**, there is no overt subject. Note that in the next sentence with the same subject and the same topic, the subject is omitted altogether (example (38c)).

- (38) a. **jekk-a=nà duw-ga=nà duw-o atti**
 leave-PFV=PL see-OBJ.3SG.M=PL see-INF so
 ‘Let’s just watch him (the man).’
 b. **mijjo ná sule makid-a-ti pendeŋ-ji**
 person NA PROG arrange-IPFV-OBJ.3SG.F bow-POSS.3SG.M
 ‘The man sat arranging his bow.’
 c. **gow-a-ŋ kese-ji**
 gather-PFV-OBJ.3PL arrow-POSS.3SG.M
 ‘[He] gathered his arrows.’ (Carnivores 30–32)

A similar construction occurs in example (39) from the same narrative. There is a shift in the discourse from the hyena’s thoughts (as he watches the man hunt) to the actions of the hyena (when he decides to return to the other animals to report what he has seen).

- (39) **bulmi ná juk-eyi maalaŋ**
 hyena NA stand-IPFV slowness
 ‘The hyena slowly got up.’ (Carnivores 46–47)

Another context where topical subjects are marked by **ná** is in an identificational construction of the form NP **ná** NP, where the first NP is the subject and the second is the predicate. This construction is discussed in Section 3.6.

An adjunct can also be marked as a topic in this way. One monologue is a response to the speaker being asked about what she did yesterday. The first sentence, example (40), begins with a **ná**-marked adverb ‘yesterday’ which refers to both the wider discourse topic, as well as the topic of the sentence.

- (40) **tande ná suk de genne**
 yesterday NA market REL.SG.F ours
 ‘Yesterday was our market.’ (Yesterday 1)

A topical noun phrase marked by **ná** does not necessarily have any grammatical function in the following proposition. As described in Section 2.3, the noun phrase in example (41) (repeated from example (26)) is not modified by the following adjective, i.e., it is not the subject of the adjectival predicate. Rather, this noun phrase refers more generally to the type of situation under discussion. The term following **ná** (a non-verbal predicate with an omitted subject) comments that this type of situation is difficult.

- (41) **meeri ná tega-gu**
 husband NA difficult-SG.M
 ‘With your husband, it’s hard [to refuse].’ (Loori 144)

3.2 Vocative

In most cases in the corpus, a pronoun, noun or proper noun in reported speech that is co-referential with the addressee is not marked by any particle. However, in a few cases a vocative element referring to the addressee occurs in a sentence-initial position marked by **ná**, as in example (42b).

- (42) a. **ni kol-e ŋ doo ta way-o ná**
 SBJ.3PL go-PRF OBL place PURP pass.time-INF NA
 ‘They went to the place where they would spend the afternoon.’
 b. **naa nilla ná ragga-jiŋ ná ana-geti**
 QUOT.3PL 2PL NA mat-POSS.2PL NA presence-POSS.3SG.F
 ‘They said: You! Your mat was still there.’ (Girl 50–51)

When vocatives are marked by **ná** in the examples found in the corpus, the addressee also has some role in the following clause (e.g., possessor of the subject ‘mat’ in example (42b)). However, it is possible to elicit a sentence like example (43) in which a vocative noun phrase marked by **ná** has no role in the following clause.

- (43) **Musa ná inu ŋ kol-o**
 Moussa NA 1SG OBL go-INF
 ‘Moussa, I am going to leave.’ (*Said to someone named Moussa.*)

The use of **ná** following vocatives contrasts with the background marker **lá** in Ewe. Ameka (1991: 155) notes that **lá** in Ewe cannot follow vocatives. Ameka explains this fact in Ewe by claiming that vocatives are inherently *not* background information: “Vocatives cannot be said to constitute a setting for the rest of the utterance... This confirms the view that the terminal particles mark background information in a clause.” There are several possible approaches to understanding this discrepancy. In a linguistic relativity approach, one might postulate that the concept of background is conceptually different for speakers of different languages and cultures. A second approach would be to analyze the vocative use of **ná** in Barayin as an additional sense or function. In other words, **ná** is polysemous in Barayin. In either of those analyses it would be expected that **ná** would occur with essentially all vocatives. However, the marker **ná** is only used with a small percentage of vocatives. A third, more plausible approach would be to assume

that there are some rare cases in which vocatives can also be topics, and that it is precisely when the topic is co-referential with the addressee that a vocative can be marked by a background marker. In this sense, it would be assumed that in example (43), Moussa is not only the person being addressed, but is also somehow the topic. For example, it is because of something Moussa did that the speaker is leaving.

3.3 Ordinal and temporal discourse information

Sentence-initial adverbial phrases marked by **ná** normally have a function of marking temporal or ordinal progression in a narrative. This use of **ná** is similar to what Ameka (1991) describes as marking “connectives” in discourse. Ordinal and temporal discourse information is background information in that it serves the purpose of helping the addressee process the following preposition by placing into its temporal context in the narrative.

For example, part of the Carnivores narrative involves each of the characters taking turns to hunt food for the group. Throughout this part of the text, most of the phrases used for ordinal numbering, such as those in examples (44), (45) and (46), are in a sentence-initial position marked by **ná**.

- (44) **de ta siidi ná maarum kol-eyi**

REL.SG.F PURP two NA panther go-IPFV

‘Second, the panther went.’ (Carnivores 13)

- (45) **de ta subu ná ni gisir-a-gi bulmi**

REL.SG.F PURP three NA SBJ.3PL send.out-IPFV-OBJ.3SG.M hyena

‘Third, they sent out the hyena.’ (Carnivores 15)

- (46) **de ta pudu ná balaw kol-eyi d-eyi**

REL.SG.F PURP four NA wolf go-IPFV kill-IPFV

‘Fourth, the wolf went and killed [something].’ (Carnivores 18)

It is not the case that all such ordinal expressions must necessarily be followed by **ná**. As mentioned in Section 1.2, an adjunct can also be in a clause-internal pre-subject position without being marked by **ná**. In the same story as examples (44), (45) and (46), the first and the fifth in the series of animals hunting begin with an ordinal expression without the marker **ná**, as seen in example (47). The semantic content of ordinal expression in this context already suggests that it is background information. It can be (redundantly) marked as background for clarity, but it does not necessarily need to be marked.

(47) **ta dawsu baɗa kol-eyi d-eyi**

PURP five dog go-IPFV kill-IPFV

‘Fifth, the dog went and killed [something].’ (Carnivores 20)

In a similar construction in example (48b), a temporal adverbial (prepositional phrase) in a sentence-initial position indicating the temporal progression of the storyline is marked with **ná**.

(48) a. **ti kol-a duw-e ŋ ger-geti siidi**

SBJ.3SG.F go-PFV go.to.bed-PRF OBL home-POSS.3SG.F own

‘She went to bed in her own hut.’

b. **ij bodo ná ni ni naa marbo ti di**

ASOC night NA SBJ.3PL DEM.SG.F QUOT.3PL girl SBJ.3SG.F DEM.SG.F

ná sent-eti aj-o

NA refusal-POSS.3SG.F come-INF

‘That night, they said: That girl refuses to come.’ (Girl 21–23)

Again, adjuncts can also occur in a pre-subject position without the marker **ná**. This can be seen in example (49) where an identical adverbial phrase appears in a sentence-initial position without the marker **ná**.

(49) **ij bodo ni dow-eyi ná nopuno juk-eyi**

ASOC night SBJ.3PL sleep-IPFV NA goat stand-IPFV

‘That night, while they slept, the goat got up.’ (Girl 27)

3.4 Conditional (if/when) clause

Part of the motivation for the concept of background is to describe grammatical marking that is used for both topics and conditional clauses. Sentence-initial conditional clauses are background information in that they serve the purpose of giving a context for interpreting the following proposition. When the marker **ná** occurs between two finite clauses, the preceding clause is often marked by the clause-initial subordinator **to**. The conjunction **to** marks subordinate clauses of either hypothetical ‘if’ or sequential ‘when’ meaning. It is common in Chadic languages for the same word to allow both conditional and temporal interpretations (Frajzyngier 1996: 313, 327). When the conditional/sequential clause (protasis) precedes the main clause (apodosis), it may be followed by **ná**, as in example (50) and (51).

- (50) a. **to ki gus-e kaye mala ŋ bu-ji ŋ**
 COND SBJ.2SG.M exit-PRF here ??? OBL mouth-POSS.3SG.M OBL
golmo-jiŋ ná
 house-POSS.2PL NA
 ‘When you’ve gone out of the entrance to your house,’
- b. **ki ŋ pid-o-geti ŋ ara**
 2.SG.M OBL take-INF-POSS.3SG.M OBL path
 ‘you will take the main road.’ (Directions 3–4)
- (51) **to ki wonni-ga ger-ne do ná ki ŋ**
 COND SBJ.2SG.M know-OBJ.3SG.M home-POSS.1PL.EXCL NEG NA SBJ.2SG.M OBL
kett-o-jiga
 ask-INF-POSS.3PL
 ‘If you don’t know our house, you will ask them.’ (Directions 28)

It is not the case that sentence-initial conditional/sequential clauses are always followed by **ná**. In example (52) and (53), the conditional clause is not followed by **ná**. Since conditional clauses are already marked by the clause-initial **to**, it is clear that they are background information even when **ná** is absent. Like the use of **ná** with temporal and ordinal markers (Section 3.3), the use of **ná** with conditional clauses is optional because conditional clauses are inherently background information.

- (52) **wo sonde [to ní kol-e siidi] ní ta ŋ gas-o**
 but now COND SBJ.2PL go-PRF home SBJ.2PL CERT OBL say-INF
ni-ya mo
 SBJ.2PL-QUOT what
 ‘And now, when you go home, what will you say?’ (Girl 53)
- (53) **[to ane kol-e] ŋ gas-o ...**
 COND 1PL.EXCL go-PRF OBL say-INF
 ‘When we arrive, we will say...’ (Girl 55)

3.5 Other finite background clauses

The use of the marker **ná** between clauses is not restricted to clauses marked by **to**. The marker **ná** can also follow an otherwise unmarked finite clause. The temporal relationship between a finite **ná**-marked clause and the following clause can generally be predicted from the TAM marking on the verb in the **ná**-marked

clause, removing the need for temporal conjunctions like ‘while’ and ‘then’. If the verb in the **ná**-marked clause has perfect marking, it will have an anterior (‘having done X then Y’) reading. If the verb in the **ná**-marked clause has imperfective marking, it will normally have a simultaneous reading (‘while X, Y’). The perfect-marked ‘then’ clauses typically contain repeated information (see tail-head linkage in Section 3.8) which does not advance the progression of the text, but repeats the temporal or narrative context for the proposition following **ná**. Simultaneous ‘while’ clauses can carry new information, but this new information serves to set the stage for the more salient storyline event in the following proposition.

In example (54b), the clause preceding **ná** has a sequential reading similar to the **to**-marked clause in example (50). The action described by the verb ‘reach/arrive’ with a perfect suffix is understood to be completed before the action described by the following clause begins.

- (54) a. **ɲ pid-o-ti ɲ chari Atiya ti di**
 OBL take-INF-POSS.3SG.F OBL path Atiya SBJ.3SG.F DEM.3SG.F
 ‘[You] will take the Atiya path.’
- b. **ki an-e ná ki ɲ jang-o ɲ kol-o ɲ**
 SBJ.2SG.M reach-PRF NA SBJ.2SG.M OBL descend-INF OBL go-INF OBL
jamiye de paa-tu
 mosque(Ar.) REL.SG.F big-SG.F
 ‘When you’ve arrived, you will go down to the big mosque.’ (Directions 6–8)

In contrast, when the verb of a **ná**-marked clause takes the imperfective TAM suffix, the most likely interpretation will be that the event predicated in the clause preceding **ná** is ongoing during the action or state expressed by the second clause in the proposition-**ná**-proposition construction. This use of imperfective aspect to express simultaneity is a common feature of background information in a narrative (Givón 2001: 339). In example (55a), the dialogue between the four main characters ends, and example (55b) follows with the progression of the narration. The first clause in example (55b) (preceding **ná**) has an imperfective verb, and the action described by the verb of this clause (‘sleeping’) is ongoing while the more salient action described by the second verb (‘getting up’) occurs.

- (55) a. **iɲ dow-u=nà sokka da iɲ ta**
 SBJ.1DU.INCL go.to.bed-SBJV=PL again then SBJ.1DU.INCL CERT
s-aa=nà
 come-SBJV=PL
 ‘We should go to bed and come again later.’

- b. **ij bodo ni dow-eyi ná nopuno juk-eyi**
 ASOC night SBJ.3PL sleep-IPFV NA goat stand-IPFV
 ‘That night, while they slept, the goat got up.’ (Girl 26–27)

A similar construction occurs in example (56c) from a different story. The verb of the clause preceded by **ná** has an imperfective TAM suffix, and describes a state that is ongoing throughout the action described by the following clause (example (56d)).

- (56) a. **illa att-e mijjo**
 except remain-PRF man
 ‘Only the man was left’
 b. **att-e mijjo ná**
 remain-PRF man NA
 ‘When only the man was left,’
 c. **ni sul-eyi ŋ doo de ni sul-lo je ná**
 SBJ.3PL sit-IPFV OBL place REL.SG.F SBJ.3PL sit-OBL PART NA
 ‘As they sat (*or were sitting*) where they sat before,’
 d. **ni gas-eyi naa mijjo ná kalla wala inda-ji**
 SBJ.3PL say-IPFV QUOT.3PL man NA 3SG.M NEG have-POSS.3SG.M
 ‘they said: The man, he has nothing.’ (Carnivores 23–25)

In this way, the interaction of **ná** with tense-aspect marking has a function similar to that of temporal conjunctions like ‘while’ and ‘then’. Such conjunctions are generally not used in Barayin, with the exception of loanwords from Chadian Arabic.

3.6 Maximal backgrounding (Presupposition-Focus)

Barayin does not have a dedicated focus marker with scope over a noun phrase or similar constituent. One way of expressing focus is through a structure in which a single term follows the background marker **ná** (proposition-**ná**-term or term-**ná**-term). The use of this structure in a focus context is what Jacob (2010) calls “indirect focus marking”, and what Güldemann (2016) calls “maximal backgrounding” and “indirect focalization”. “The crucial requirement for backgrounding to assume the central role for focalization is that it is MAXIMAL in the sense that it removes all but one potential focus host from the assertion domain” (Güldemann 2016: 577, emphasis in original).

Interrogative sentences with an interrogative pronoun inherently involve focus on the question word, and the rest of the utterance is pragmatically presupposed (Lambrecht 1994: 283). Two examples of this were given in Section 2.4, one of which is repeated in example (57). All of the information before *ná* is background or presupposed, and the single question word after *ná* is in focus.

- (57) **mapana ki d-ii-ga ná talan**
 thing SBJ.2SG.M kill-PFV-OBJ.3SG.M NA how
 ‘How did you kill this thing?’ (lit., thing you killed, how?) (Carnivores 68)

One other place where maximal backgrounding occurs in the corpus is in reported speech. In one type of reported speech, the verb of speech or quotative marker is followed by a demonstrative *gi* which is in a cataphoric relationship of apposition with the following clause of reported speech. This can be seen in example (58b). A similar construction is seen in example (58c), however, in this example, the marker *ná* separates the cataphoric demonstrative from the rest of the clause in a proposition-*ná*-term structure. The explanation for this is that example (58c) is a response to the question in example (58a): ‘What will you say?’. Thus the complement of the verb ‘say’ in example (58c) is in focus in the response to the question.

- (58) a. **wo sonde to ní kol-e siidi ní ta ɲ gas-o**
 but now COND SBJ.2PL go-PRF home SBJ.2PL CERT OBL say-INF
ni-ya mo
 SBJ.2PL-QUOT what
 ‘And now, when you go home, what will you say?’
- b. **bulmi kaa gi**
 hyena QUOT.3SG.M DEM.SG.M
 ‘Hyena said this:’
- c. **ane ... to ane kol-e ɲ gas-o ná gi**
 1PL.EXCL COND 1PL.EXCL go-PRF OBL say-INF NA DEM.SG.M
 ‘When we arrive, we will say this:’
- d. **ragga ná iɲ t-eyi t-ii do**
 mat NA SBJ.1DU.INCL eat-IPFV eat-INF NEG
 ‘We didn’t eat the mat.’ (Girl 53, 55–56)

Although it rarely occurs in the corpus, it is possible to construct other types of declarative sentences of the same syntactic structure and information structure. Similar examples have been documented in several Central Chadic languages (e.g., Buwal (Viljoen 2015: 29), Muyang (Smith 2003: 4), Mbuko (Gravina 2003: 8), Zulgo (Haller and Watters 1984: 38), and Mofu-Gudur (Hollingsworth

1985: 5)). In example (59) (repeated from Section 2.4), the speaker understood there to be contrastive focus on the utterance-final noun phrase following the marker **ná**. The French equivalent given was *Il ne mange que la viande*. In other words, **suu** ‘meat’ is selected as the object of **teyi** ‘eat’, in contrast to anything else in the set of possible things to eat in that context.

- (59) **ka t-eyi ná suu**
 SBJ.3SG.M eat-IPFV NA meat

‘It’s meat that he eats. (He’s not eating anything else.)’

In example (60), the marker **ná** separates an infinitival (nominalized) verbal complement phrase from the rest of the proposition. The interpretation is similar. There is contrastive focus on the complement of the verb ‘know’, namely the infinitival verb phrase ‘making *boule*’. She knows how to prepare *boule*, but she does not know how to do other things.

- (60) **ti wonn-eyi ná gan-o ŋ ino**
 SBJ.3SG.F know-IPFV NA do-INF OBL *boule*

‘What she knows is how to make *boule*.’

A final example of maximal backgrounding is found in identificational sentences. Identificational sentences equate a pronominal demonstrative with a noun phrase, such as “That is Joe Smith” (Higgins, 1973; Heller and Wolter, 2008; Moltmann, 2013). This construction is used for the purpose of giving the identity of a particular (known) referent. It could be the response to a question such as “Who is that?” or “What is this?” In the identificational sentence in Barayin, the demonstrative pronoun consists of a subject proclitic followed by an adnominal demonstrative. In examples (61) and (62), the marker **ná** follows the subject-demonstrative pronominal. This is followed by a noun phrase giving the identity of the subject. The explanation for the use of **ná** in this structure is that the pronominal element is presupposed or background information, and the constituent following **ná** is in focus, perhaps in response to a question about the identity of the subject.

- (61) **ka gi ná sek ge ŋ gera gi**
 SBJ.3SG.M DEM.SG.M NA chief(Ar.) REL.SG.M OBL village DEM.SG.M

‘This is the chief of the village.’ (Lovestrland 2012: 208)

- (62) **ti di ná non-ju di**
 SBJ.3SG.F DEM.SG.F NA child-POSS.1SG DEM.SG.F

‘This is my daughter.’ (Lovestrland 2012: 208)

The pair of examples (63) and (64) show that, while focus information can occur following **ná**, it cannot occur in the constituent preceding **ná**. The identificational construction (maximal backgrounding) in example (63) would be a natural way to identify someone as the chief when presenting a group of people one at a time. That is, in a context where the referents are already given, and the identity is the new information. In contrast, in example (64), the context is that someone has asked about the identity of the chief. In this context, the subject pronominal is the answer to a question (it is in focus), and it cannot be followed by **ná**. Likewise interrogative words cannot be placed on their own before **ná**. In Barayin, it is not possible to place focused items before the marker **ná**. The same is true of the background marker in Ewe (Ameka 1991: 152–153) and in Zulgo (Haller and Watters 1984: 29–30).

- (63) **ka gi ná mon**
 SBJ.3SG.M DEM.SG.M NA chief
 ‘(Presenting a group of people one-by-one) This man is the chief.’

- (64) **ka gi (*ná) mon**
 SBJ.3SG.M DEM.SG.M NA chief
 ‘(Who is the chief?) The chief is this man.’

In identificational constructions, the pronominal preceding **ná** is not only presupposed, but is also the topic. Identificational constructions in Barayin are both topic-comment and presupposition-focus. In other words, the information structure of an identificational construction is topic-**ná**-focus.

3.7 General backgrounding of previous discourse

The use of **ná** in a sentence-initial position is quite rare, only occurring twice in the corpus. These two cases are shown in examples (31) and (32) in Section 2.5. The limited data makes it difficult to precisely describe the function of the sentence-initial use of **ná**. Viljoen (2015: 46) states that when a similar discourse particle occurs in a sentence-initial position in the Central Chadic language Buwal, it does so “in order to give prominence to a theme-line event. It also indicates that the previous information is backgrounded with respect to what follows.” The sentence-initial **ná** in example (31) could plausibly be giving “prominence” to the following clause, but the context does not give any satisfactory reasons why this clause should be particularly prominent in the narrative. In example (32), the clause following the sentence-initial **ná** is the final clause of the narrative—a postscript signaling that the narrator has finished her story. There is no reason to think of this sentence as “prominent”. At this point, the most that

can be said about the rare use of sentence-initial **ná** is that it does not indicate any close pragmatic or logical connection with the preceding clause or term. It could plausibly be thought of as indicating that the reason for the following sentence is explained by the general context of the preceding discourse. This would clearly explain its use in the final sentence of the narrative in example (32), and could plausibly be applied to example (31) as well.

3.8 Tail-head linkage and point of departure

When the marker **ná** follows an element repeated from the end of the preceding sentence this creates tail-head linkage. Tail-head linkage is a structure where “the tail of one sentence... is recapitulated as the head or the beginning of the following sentence” (Longacre and Hwang 2012: 7). This pattern can be used as a discourse strategy for showing the continuity or progression of a sequence of sentences in a text. The repeated information serves as background for the following proposition. This discourse function is seen not only in a term-**ná**-proposition construction, but also in a proposition-**ná**-proposition construction.

Example (65) is part of an oral history of the settlement of Barayin territory. The narrator repeatedly states that the travelers arrived in a village, and then repeats the name of that village with the marker **ná** at the beginning of the next sentence describing their move to the next new village. Note that all of the examples in (65) are sequential in the original text, one following immediately after the other with no intervening material.

- (65) a. **min Dugur ná ni s-eyi jel-eyi Alaw**
 from(Ar.) Dugur NA SBJ.3PL come-IPFV put-IPFV Alaw
 ‘From Dugur, they put [some people] at Alaw.’
- b. **Alaw ná ni kol-eyi jel-eyi Wore**
 Alaw NA SBJ.3PL go-IPFV put-IPFV Wore
 ‘From Alaw, they put [some people] at Wore.’
- c. **Wore ná ni kol-eyi jel-eyi Bose**
 Wore NA SBJ.3PL go-IPFV put-IPFV Bose
 ‘From Wore, they put [some people] at Bose.’
- d. **Bose ná ni kol-eyi jel-eyi ŋ Bela**
 Bose NA SBJ.3PL go-IPFV put-IPFV OBL Bela
 ‘From Bose, they put [some people] at Bela.’
- e. **ŋ Bela ná ni s-eyi jel-a-ti Mebra**
 OBL Bela NA SBJ.3PL come-IPFV put-IPFV-OBJ.3SG.F Mebra

‘From Bela, they put someone at Mebra.’

- f. **min Mebra ná ni kol-eyi jel-eyi mejere Dakro**
 from(Ar.) Mebra NA SBJ.3PL go-IPFV put-IPFV people Dakro

‘After Mebra, they put some people at Dakro.’ (History 33-38)

Example (66) is part of the one procedural text in the corpus. Step-by-step directions are given to walk from one part of Mongo to another. The marker **ná** often follows constituents referring to landmarks that were given in the previous sentence (in prepositional phrases and noun phrases). The main clause then explains the action to take once having arrived at the landmark, as is done with the **Alay** market in example (66).

- (66) a. **ki ŋ tirs-o ŋ bu-geti ŋ suk Alay**
 SBJ.2SG.M OBL arrive-INF OBL mouth-POSS.3SG.F OBL market Alay
 ‘You will arrive at the entrance to the Alay market.’
- b. **ŋ suk Alay ná direkt ki ŋ jaŋg-o**
 OBL market Alay NA directly SBJ.2SG.M OBL descend-INF
 ‘At the Alay market, you will keep going straight down.’ (Direction 9–10)

In the same text the marker **ná** also follows finite clauses (proposition-**ná**-proposition) that repeat the verb from the previous sentence. The verb ‘ask’ which appears in a future tense construction in example (67a) is repeated in example (67b) with a perfect TAM suffix.

- (67) a. **ki ŋ kett-o-jiga nilla**
 SBJ.2SG.M OBL ask-INF-POSS.3PL 3PL
 ‘You will ask them.’
- b. **minde kett-e nilla ná nilla ná ŋ gas-o-geti ŋ**
 after ask-PRF 3PL NA 3PL NA OBL say-INF-POSS.3SG.F OBL
bu-ji ŋ golmo
 mouth-POSS.3SG.M OBL house
 ‘After having asked them, they will show you the entrance to the house.’ (Direction 28–29)

In examples (68) and (69), the clause marked by **ná** does not repeat verbatim the verb of the previous clause, but the clause does provide an obvious semantic link or anchor. For this reason, they are not cases of tail-head linkage, but more general “points of departure” which have a similar discourse function (e.g., Lambrecht 1994: 44, 51; Levinsohn 2012: 40; Weil 1844: 25).

- (68) a. **ɲ pid-e-ti ɲ chari Atiya ti di**
 OBL take-PRF-OBJ.3SG.F OBL path Atiya SBJ.3SG.F DEM.SG.F
 ‘You will take the Atiya road.’
- b. **ki an-e ná ki ɲ jaŋg-o ɲ kol-o**
 SBJ.2SG.M reach-PRF NA SBJ.2SG.M OBL descend-INF OBL mosque(Ar.)
ɲ jamiye de paa-tu
 REL.3SG.F big-SG.F
 ‘When you’ve arrived, you will go down to the big mosque.’ (Directions 6–7)
- (69) a. **ki ɲ kol-o ɲ jamiye de lokud-o**
 SBJ.2SG.M OBL go-INF OBL mosque(Ar.) REL.SG.F descend-INF
 ‘You will go to the lower mosque.’
- b. **ki an-e ɲ jamiye de paa-tu tilla ná**
 SBJ.2SG.M reach-PRF OBL mosque(Ar.) REL.SG.F big-SG.F 3SG.F NA
ki ɲ kol-o...
 SBJ.2SG.M OBL go-INF
 ‘Once you’ve reached the big mosque, you will go...’ (Direction 14–15)

4 Conclusion

The particle **ná** in Barayin separates a sentence into two parts, marking the preceding element as what Ameka (1991) refers to as background information (which has also been called “topic” (Chafe 1976)). Background information serves to help the addressee understand a proposition by giving the context in which that information should be interpreted. This can include clarifying the topic (“what the sentence is about”), giving temporal or ordinal information that clarifies where the proposition fits into the discourse structure, giving situational information about what is occurring at the time of the proposition, or repeating previously given information in a tail-head linkage structure. Backgrounding also serves to indirectly mark focus items by placing all the presupposed information before the background marker. The single term occurring after the background marker is understood to be in focus.

Similar markers occur in many other Chadic languages, West African languages and possibly in languages spoken in other parts of the world. However, these markers do not all necessarily “share the same functional and syntactic profile” (Güldemann 2016: 571). This presents a challenge for descriptive and comparative studies. What does the claim that **ná** is a background marker mean if background markers do not all function the same way cross-linguistically? How

should we understand the fact that the background marker *lá* in Ewe cannot follow vocatives, but the background marker in Barayin can (Section 3.2)? Should the use of *lá* to mark the end of relative clauses in Ewe (and other languages) be understood as another type of background, or a separate function of the same marker (Ameka 1991: 152)? Do such differences between these markers mean that these are polyfunctional morphemes with language-specific lexicalized functions within the general semantic range of background information? Or do speakers of these language define background in different ways? Are there other factors that indirectly influence the way background markers can be used? Why do some languages allow more than one background marker in the same sentence, while others do not (Güldemann 2016: 567)? One potential way forward in gaining a deeper understanding of these markers could be to apply the “semantic mapping” method (Haspelmath, 2003). This approach would allow detailed comparisons of the similarities and differences in the functions of background markers in different languages.

This article helps clarify these typological questions and contributes towards finding satisfactory answers by giving a detailed analysis of the syntactic distribution and common semantic and pragmatic contexts of *ná* in Barayin. This article is also a first step towards understanding the information-structural features of Barayin grammar. More generally, this study of Barayin makes another contribution to the documentation of a minority language in the underdocumented group of East Chadic languages.

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Abbreviations

ASOC	'associative (with/and)',
CERT	'certainty',
COND	'conditional (if/when)',
DAT	'dative/indirect object',
DEM	'(adnominal) demonstrative',
DTRV	'detransitivizer',
DU	'dual',
EXCL	'exclusive',
F	'feminine',
FOC	'(contrastive) focus',
IDEO	'ideophone',
INCL	'inclusive',
INF	'infinitive',
IPFV	'imperfective',
M	'masculine',
NEG	'negation',
OBJ	'direct object',
OBL	'oblique',
PART	'(unidentified) particle',
PFV	'perfective'
PL	'plural',
PROG	'progressive',
POSS	'possessive',
PRF	'perfect',
PURP	'purposive',
Q	'question/interrogative mood',
QUOT	'quotative',
REL	'relative clause marker',
SBJ	'subject',
SBJV	'subjunctive',
SG	'singular',
1	'first person',
2	'second person',
3	'third person',
(Ar.)	'Chadian Arabic loan word',
(Fr.)	'French loan word'

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